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ABSTRACT

The author discusses and reviews child-rearing literature prevalent in many modern home libraries. In 53 volumes on various aspects of child-rearing, there is a noticeable lack of discussion on who should bear the direct responsibility for raising children, with only two books covering the topic. About half the books do not have any discussion at all of sex roles in parenting. The remaining half can be arbitrarily placed on a contimuum from those which unquestionable validate the usefulness of strict sex-role delineation in parenting, to those which assume its usefulness and do not even bother to discuss the issue, to those which openly question the value and basis for assuming differences between the behaviors of mothers and fathers. The author offers his own conclusion on parenting which, abbreviated, is that "children are not a mother's responsibility, nor a father's... they are parents' responsibility." He notes that enough energy has been consumed in the search for the differences between men and women, and fathers and mothers; it is time to search for similarities. (Author/PC)

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A FATHER'S GUIDE TO PARENT GUIDES:
REVIEW AND ASSESSMENT OF THE PATERNAL ROLE
AS CONCEIVED IN THE POPULAR LITERATURE

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A FATHER'S GUIDE TO PARENT GUIDES

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There are more than fifty books on the market today for parents. Literally millions of words have been written by pediatricians, psychologists, social workers, educators, and others on how to raise children. As a parent and professional in family studies, I've had more than a passing interest in these many volumes, and in recent years have begun to collect them. The shelf I devote to popular child-rearing books is now a long one, and bulges almost weekly with new additions. I collect them casually, unacademically, in the manner of a parent browsing for something to read on how to survive life's most demanding endeavor. The books on my shelf were not found in the catacombs of the graduate library, but in the bookNooks, bus depots, and newsstands that distribute them by the thousands to American homes. For this reason, the list of books I have compiled is probably quite representative of those books readily available to most literate parents, though the list may not be exhaustive of the genre.

In my research on androgynous parenting patterns I make frequent visits into homes to interview couples. The overwhelming majority of these middle-class parents exhibit a handful of popular child-rearing books on the coffee tables and bookshelves of their living rooms. As one young mother noted:

> Well, like my mother, when I was pregnant and talking about what do you do with a baby, she said, 'Oh, you'll know. It just comes to you.' Well! It doesn't, folks!

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And so, this parent as countless others hustled on down to the booknook, bus terot, or newsstand I was frequenting. She bought a few volumes on how to live with kids, curled up, read a bit, and came to the sad conclusion that "most of the books written on child-rearing assume that the mother will be rearing the child." I found this hard to believe, but after poring through every book I could get my hands on I have come to the same conclusion. Though nearly two-thirds of the books are written by men, the vast majority of the authors operate from the unwritten but oft-times obvious assumption that father is little more than a glorified breadwinner--a shining and occasional visitor to the inner circle of emotional warmth and support provided by mother. For most of these writers, mothers raise children, and that is reasonable and good.

From the books on my child-rearing shelf I can cull literally hundreds of discussions on bedwetting, spanking, breastfeeding, whining, discipline, babysitters, impetigo, pin worms, and the like. If you want to know how to talk "childrenese," how to play with your child, how to communicate with your child, how to cope with your child, or how to give your child a superior mind, I can refer you to the proper texts. I can direct you to more admonitions to love your child than I care to think about at this point. And, if you wish to hear of "the awesome responsibility of parenthood," I can show you chapters and verses. But as one working-class father once said to me about awesome responsibilities, "As a parent, I'm always painfully aware of my awesome responsibilities; I've had professionals and their 'awesome responsibilities' right up to here!"

Before the audience writes me off as a gnarled cynic and serious misanthrope, I had best note my feelings on child-rearing books in general: Their vast quantities threaten to wipe out all species of trees in North America,

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but most are well-meaning and well-done. Few authors set out with the Herculean goal of writing about every subject and issue they felt of import to parents. Most limited their discussions to specific topics, such as communication, adolescence, health, behavior, or development. The sins I believe they have committed then are less of commission than **omission.** In fifty-three volumes on various aspects of how to raise children, I found only two discussions of what I would subjectively label one of the most important issues that confronts parents today--who shall bear the direct responsibility for raising children.

About half the books do not have any discussion of sex roles in parenting at all. These are books that are either dealing with specific aspects of child-rearing, or are written to parents in a manner which does not in some subtle or not so subtle manner imply that mothers are responsible solely for the day-to-day care of children. Gender is not a consideration in these books, and all mention is carefully deleted, leaving it up to parents to decide issues of responsibility.

The remaining half of the parenting guides can be arbitrarily placed on a continuum from those which unquestionably validate the usefulness of strict sex-role delineation in parenting, to those which assume its usefulness and do not even bother to discuss the issue, to those which openly question the value and basis for assuming differences between the behaviors of mothers and fathers.

Buxbaum in Your Child Makes Sense states that "it is true both for animals and men that the mother has the task to take care of the young (Buxbaum, 1949, p. 156)." Sometimes, however, due to different circumstances the roles of mothers and fathers may be reversed. The reversals may be acceptable to the parents, but it is confusing to the children and desirable

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to revert "to the more 'natural' situation (Buxbaum, 1949, p. 157)."

In Child Behavior Ilg and Ames argue that the father has too often "been expected to play the role of second mother instead of his own special role"; thus, many of his own personal needs are disregarded in order to make him "a better father (Ilg & Ames, 1955, p. 215)."

> Might it not be preferable, for instance, for him to have a little relaxation at the end of a busy day at work, a time to read his paper and to relax a little before he joins the family group and meets its demands upon him? (Ilg & Ames, 1955, p. 215).

The authors see father's role as essential to the development of children, but supplementary to that of the mother. "Above all, it should be Father's role, as disciplinarian, to back up Mother's policies (Ilg & Ames, 1955, p. 218)." The paternal and maternal roles are complementary; father provides firmness and understanding, while mother provides gentleness and understanding. Both are essential ingredients for a stable family.

To Ginott in Between Parent and Child a father is a person who needs to relax when he comes home from work, while mother tends to dinner and the children. Ginott takes an almost wistful view of the world of old:

> In former times, mother represented love and sympathy, while father personified discipline and morality. The children, especially the boys, derived their conscience mainly from him. It was the internalized image of the father that warned them against temptations and scolded them for transgressions. Thus, father served as a link between the family and the world.
>
> In the modern family, the roles of mother and father are no longer distinct (Ginott, 1965, p. 201).

This indistinct world we live in leads to problems, according to Ginott. Many fathers welcome new opportunities for closer contact with their infants, bringing up "the danger that the baby may end up with two mothers, rather than with a mother and a father (Ginott, 1965, p. 201)." And, while there should be flexibility for persons of either sex to find fulfillment in any occupational

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role, "life is easier when most men and women are not engaged in mutual competition and rivalry (Cinott, 1965, p. 209)." Father then, to Cinott, is the protector of the child "against threats from the outer world, against fears from the inner world, and against overprotection by mother (Cinott, 1965, p. 201)."

In How To Raise a Human Being Salk and Kramer ask, rhetorically, "Is there really any adequate substitute for a warm, responsive mother (Salk & Kramer, 1969, p. 29)?" One might easily reply, "Yes, a warm, responsive parent." In What Every Child Would Like His Parents to Know Salk argues that fathers who have been actively involved in the care of their young children have a better relationship later on than those who have not. The primary role in child care, however, is still reserved in Salk's mind for the mother. No reason is given as to why this should be so. He does note that "a good father is a little bit like a mother (Salk, 1972, p. 38)," and that fathers act as models for children of what husbands are and what fathers are. But it is never clear just how a father differs from a mother.

Brazelton in Infants and Mothers argues that many fathers are not part of the family, and bemoans the notion that the mother has become the emotional head.

In Natural Parenthood LeShan brings the purportedly hopeful message to the reader that our "sometimes rebellious, often sloppy and forgetful, occasional really naughty boy will some day be a mature, responsible 'doctor, lawyer, Indian chief," and that his younger sister, "the one in blue jeans who loses her mittens, forgets to feed the dog, refuses to help with the dishes, and can't sit still, the one who's hair is always flying in all directions--she's going to be an excellent homemaker, wife and mother, community worker (LeShan, 1970, p. 89)." Father will help in the development of daughter by making her feel "womanly

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(LeShan, 1970, p. 69)," though, again, we are given no understanding of how this differs from feeling "manly." LeShan in On "How Do Your Children Grow?" expresses enthusiasm that fathers have been liberated in the past few years to be able to enjoy infant care, but should not be forced to participate if they do not wish to. She fails to note that women, for some inexplicable reason, have no such choice in the matter.

Olshaker in What Shall We Tell the Kids? pleads for more paternal involvement in child-rearing, but there is no question in his mind of "the infant's need for a single mothering figure to take care of him (Olshaker, 1971, p. 26)." Fathers need to realize that while their work may be difficult it is a diversion that mothers do not have. They should do whatever they can to relieve mothers of drudgery in the evenings and on weekends, helping with diapers and occasional feedings. And, if fathers are understanding and helpful toward their wives, "women may feel better about caring for their children and enjoy them more (Olshaker, 1971, p. 27)."

Rutherford contends that children need both a "mothering" person and a "fathering" person, though he also fails to note how they should differ.

> If you are a father who shares actively in the care of his baby, who plays with him, bathes him, carries him around, the bond between you becomes very strong (Rutherford, 1971, p. 175).

The father's closeness and friendliness has vital effects on the characters and lives of his children, Rutherford concludes, but offers no explanation.

The Black Child--A Parent's Guide discusses the special problems of raising black children in a white-dominant society. The authors, Harrison-Ross and Wyden, contend that the black father plays an important role. By staying around and taking part in rearing his children, he negates

> ...any tendency of the mother to cut her sons down. It's up to his wife to encourage him to do this. Instead of shooing him out of the house, she should do her damndest to get him to stay around and be a true father to his children (Harrison-Ross & Wyden, 1973, p. 239).

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A father teaches his son about "the man's world where he's going to take his place," and that "men's worlds and women's worlds aren't necessarily so different (Harrison-Ross & Wyden, 1973, p. 239)."

In The Feeling Child Janov argues that during the critical early months of an infant's development fathers should get some kind of leave from work to help mothers "attend to the most important job in the world... helping a new human being get the best chance possible in life (Janov, 1973, p. 207)." He adds, however, that,

> The Women's Liberation Movement has many important things to say about equality between the sexes. But there is no way a man can truly 'mother' his child. He can certainly share and contribute a great deal, but he cannot breast feed the baby in the first year of life, and I believe this experience, with all the softness, holding, and love surrounding it, is crucial in the prevention of neurosis (Janov, 1973, p. 207).

Janov says he has heard professional women planning to return to work soon after the baby is born by hiring professional household help.

> I cannot express strongly enough my contempt for this sort of motherhood. If a woman is not planning to do mothering in the true sense, she shouldn't become one! (Janov, 1973, p. 207).

In The Parents Had for Children Blaine argues that parenthood may be an overwhelming burden in many cases, and proposes that the "responsibility for the upbringing of children should be a shared one (Blaine, 1973, p. 147)." Extraordinarily, he fails to consider that husbands might share in the responsibility with wives; instead, he states that,

> Parents should have an opportunity to delegate the care of their children to others who are trustworthy and capable from the hours of eight in the morning until six in the evening, six days a week, eleven months a year (Blaine, 1973, p. 148).

It is quite clear that Fitzhugh Dodson's first child-rearing manual, How to Parent, is written for mothers. "When you become a mother," he begins, "you join the ranks of an absolutely unique, twenty-four-hour-a-day profession:

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a parent (Dodson, 1970, p. 21)." He commands that "Though Shalt Not let father ignore the baby (Dodson, 1970, p. 70)." Father has a crucial role to play in giving preschool boys the physical interaction and rough-housing they need. And, fathers display the tenderness and softness a little girl needs "to encourage her coquettishness and femininity (Dodson, 1970, p. 179)." Dodson does not advocate father taking mother's place in feeding and burping the baby, giving him his bath, or changing his diapers, though he does recommend that father be knowledgeable in these areas and help occasionally. It simply "would not be psychologically healthy for the family to have father come home from his day's work and be expected to take over as a full-time mother until it is time for him to go to work the next day (Dodson, 1970, p. 71)."

With remarks such as these as background, I found myself not particularly hopeful when this year Dodson came out with what he proclaims to be "the first truly comprehensive guide for fathers (Dodson, 1974, dust jacket)," How to Father. In it he urges fathers to get involved with their children from the beginning, but warns that though there are aspects of parenting where both sexes can equally contribute, "One parent cannot possibly play both roles," for "the feminine role of the mother is different from the masculine role of the father (Dodson, 1974, p. 9)." For Dodson, male and female strengths complement each other, and the weakness of one are born successfully by the strengths of the other. Fathers are around to compensate for the overprotectiveness of mothers; fathers help boys through the Oedipal complex, and provide a model of manhood for both sons and daughters. Richard A. Gardner, the Columbia psychoanalyst, notes in the foreward to Dodson's book that "almost unconsciously, many writers of such manuals have composed them with the mother in mind (Dodson, 1974, p. xiii)." This criticism can be levelled at Dodson, also; the thought never seems to cloud his mind that men should do anything but go dutifully to

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work in the morning, leaving women to stay home with the children. The world is orderly and neat, and no other possibilities seem to exist.

Spock, of course, is the superstar of child-care manual writers. His Baby and Child Care is into its twenty-fourth printing, and is easily the best-selling book for parents. Spock has taken a lot of criticism from feminists for his remarks on sex roles. Perhaps his most derided words come from his early views on "The Father As Companion (Spock, 1968, p. 321)." Girls need fathers, too, he noted, after writing of why friendship and paternal acceptance were important to boys.

> She doesn't exactly pattern herself after him, but she gains confidence in herself as a girl and a woman from feeling his approval. I'm thinking of little things he can do, like complimenting her on her dress, or hairdo, or the cookies she's made. When she is older, he can show her that he's interested in her opinions and let her in on some of his (Spock, 1968, p. 321).

Spock encourages fathers to get involved with the infant from the beginning. But,

> Of course, I don't mean that the father has to give just as many bottles or change just as many diapers as the mother. But it's fine for him to do these things occasionally (Spock, 1968, p. 31).

In other sections of the manual, fathers are urged to share in the discipline of children, and help the young boy in the resolution of his Oedipal Complex. But, all in all, it is clear in Baby and Child Care that Spock is not willing or ready to genuinely confront the issue of responsibility for children. Though Spock apologizes in the beginning of the book for the gender of the pronouns he employs, babies throughout still are hes, parents, by and large, are shes, pediatricians are hes, and nurses are shes. The world is very simple.

To Spock's credit, however, he has had the humility to take criticism and rethink his positions. In his latest book on child-rearing, he contends that "the father--any father--should be sharing with the mother the day-to-day

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care of their children from birth onward (Spock, 1974, p. 242)." Whereas the vast majority of previous books relegate fathers to almost a symbolic level of strength, courage and power, Spock urges in his new book that men become involved in the essences of parent-child relationships--"explaining, directing, rescuing, comforting, correcting (Spock, 1974, p. 242)." Father is no more the figurehead, no more the defender of innocence; instead, he is involved in the roll-up-your-sleeves nitty gritty of child-rearing. When father is at home in the morning, in the evening, and on weekends, Spock contends he should put in as much time as the mother on child care, whether or not the mother works outside the home. And, Spock adds, "the father should take on a fair chunk of the house chores, too (Spock, 1974, p. 242)," including shopping, cooking, cleaning, and washing clothes. This work should not simply be done out of consideration for the mother, but to show that the father considers child care and housework as "vital, worthy, and challenging as his job (Spock, 1974, p. 243)."

Regarding sex role differentiation, he says it is hard to imagine what would be left of male and female identities "if boys and girls were brought up with the idea that the only real differences between them (aside from individual differences) were in their anatomies and in their generative functions (Spock, 1974, p. 252)." Boys and girls would probably not become less sure of their basic, predominant sex identifications if we stop making an issue of how different they are supposed to be in terms of clothes, play-things, behavior, and life expectations. Though he is not sure what the results would be, he does not shirk from thoughts of beginning a major experiment on a nation-wide scale:

> Other societies assign roles to men and women that are quite unlike ours. But no country I know of has tried to bring them up to think of themselves as similar. Such an attempt would be the most unprecedented social experiment in the history of our species (Spock, 1974, p. 252).

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"It's time," Spock concludes, "for the society to become more adapted to human needs (Spock, 1974, p. 252)."

Church in Understanding Your Child from Birth to Three presents a unique and viable approach to child-rearing by considering not only the individual psychological aspects of parenting, but exploring those aspects outside the realm of the immediate family, including the society as a whole. Men, he argues, should share in the housework and care of the children, "not only because such sharing will ease the woman's burden but also because it can bring deep emotional gratifications for the father and his child (Church, 1973, p. 231)." This ideal of shared responsibility in homemaking is not easy to obtain, he warns, but it remains for him an ideal to strive for. If both parents work full time outside the home, there is a problem of who will look after the children. They are faced by a day's accumulation of housework on return from a day's work outside the home. And, the sex-typing of their early years has prepared most women for only a narrow range of occupations and disqualified most men for child care, cooking, sewing, and housekeeping.

> A new division of responsibilities requires that we redesign our sex roles, which may mean a shattering of present work patterns, habits of thought, and deeply ingrained attitudes (Church, 1973, p. 231).

For Church, the eight-hour work day is not sacred, and he goes on to discuss the many problems couples who wish to share child-rearing responsibilities will be confronted by--inflexible jobs, child-care, scheduling, in-grained attitudes, and others. The solutions, he admits, are not easily come by, but his thoughts carry the reader farther out onto the edge of the realm of possibility than any other author. The family is not observed in vacuo; rather, the forces of society that serve or impinge on the rights and responsibilities of parents are also considered.

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In writing a child-care manual, many an author is careful to explain why he or she has chosen to add to the already horrendously long list of titles. It seems incredible that whatever one could say for parents on children has not been said at least a dozen times before in print. But many writers manage to justify their new words, gently castigating their predecessors for not getting to the point, overlooking important data, or ignoring an important aspect altogether. Not to break tradition then, I, in conclusion, offer up a few words on parents that I believe need to be said:

The burdens of child-rearing are too great to place on the shoulders of mothers alone. Countless women have pointed out quite eloquently how devastating this round-the-clock, seven-days-a-week, year-in-year-out responsibility can be. Many men are quick to counter, conjuring up the deadliness of the working world. "The guy who wins the rat race is still a rat," William Sloane Coffin pointedly notes. Neither motherhood nor fatherhood as they exist in our traditional mythos are clearly enviable.

The benefits of child-rearing are also too great to be the sole possession of mothers. Many fathers have told me of the loneliness they suffered from being "a stranger in my own home," how they scaled down their occupational efforts to become more involved with their children, and of the joy they experienced to be "part of the family again." I question whether this is a phenomenon isolated to the liberal elements of the middle-class, for I have talked to many working-class fathers with similar feelings, such as the postal worker who was taking a $150 cut in pay to get off the "grave yard shift" in order to see his children more. "It won't be easy getting along without that extra money, but we have some saved," he reasoned. His wife, obviously happy at the prospect, added that "we have a big garden this year and we'll do a lot of canning."

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Children are not a mother's responsibility, nor a father's. They are parents' responsibility. This is not to be construed as a defense, in any way, of a status quo which calls a father a parent simply because he provides money for food, shelter, and clothing. Fathers, in this non-traditional view, are not fulfilling their responsibilities to their children unless they take an equitable share of the child-rearing burdens and benefits from their wives. And they are not fulfilling their responsibilities to their wives until they offer the genuine opportunity for women to pursue a career of their own or a way to identify themselves outside the immediate context of the family.

To do this, however, will not only take a major revolution in the way individuals view the family, but will take massive reorganization of society itself, which, at present, is designed to keep women at home and men at work. Employers must build in a flexibility in jobs to fit the desires of the humans that hold them. Part-time work must be made more plentiful and lucrative. Professional child-care must be improved. These changes, of course, will be difficult, but necessary if we wish to make it possible for people to have genuine freedom in determining who they are and who they hope to become.

Professionals may contribute to these changes by thinking about the inequities of the society as a whole, as well as dealing with the problems of families on an individual basis.

Reflecting the values of the culture from which they spring, most of the books on child-rearing assume that we all, as good parents, want to socialize our boys into "masculine" beings, and our girls into "feminine" beings. Rare, however, is there a discussion of what it means, precisely, to be a woman, and what it means, precisely, to be a man. Granted, of course, there are obvious physiological differences, but from there the basic "natural"

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differences are infinitely harder to chronicle. Even more rare, as I noted, is a down-to-brass-tacks discussion of how men and women can explore together ways of freeing themselves from a questionable destiny as father or mother to become, instead, parents. Enough energy has been consumed in the search for the differences between men and women, fathers and mothers. It is time to search for the similarities.

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